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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [MOPS](#) [PREF](#) [GG](#) [RU](#)  
SUBJECT: NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL VISIT TO TBILISI

REF: A. TBILISI 1602  
[1](#)B. USNATO 334

Classified By: Ambassador Kurt Volker  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The North Atlantic Council (NAC) visited Georgia September 15-16 to take stock following Russia's invasion of Georgia, to reaffirm support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to strengthen NATO-Georgia relations (including by inaugurating the NATO-Georgia Commission). The NAC held separate formal meetings with President Saakashvili, Prime Minister Gurgenidze, and members of the Georgian Parliament. Representatives of the UN, EU, and OSCE also briefed PermReps in a special session. The NAC also conducted a number of outreach activities, as well as visiting a damaged military base and a refugee camp in Gori. This was not a paradigm-changing visit. Georgia reaffirmed its commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration and NAC Ambassadors reaffirmed their only slightly evolving national positions. End summary.

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Saakashvili Says Same Plans  
for Euro-Atlantic integration  
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[1](#)2. (C) President Saakashvili greeted the SYG and PermReps by professing deep gratitude for this visit. He saw the NAC trip as a symbol that Georgia does not stand alone, and that NATO and Georgia share common principles. Saakashvili observed that the bonds between NATO and Georgia stem from a common interest in greater security in the South Caucasus, bonds that should be seen as a threat to no one. The President said this war was not of Georgia's choosing, nor of Georgia's initiative. He enthusiastically referred to new evidence entering the public domain that Russia had initiated a conflict in an attempt to redraw the map of Europe, and overthrow a democratic government. Saakashvili thought that the international community had responded loudly and clearly to Russia's challenge to international law. He expressed thanks for NATO's strong statements during the conflict, saying that Georgia's ability to withstand the Russian onslaught had been linked to its friends and partners in the West, including NATO. Saakashvili underlined the Georgian people had suffered too long under authoritarian regimes to

relinquish the gains of recent years and promised to announce a new and deeper series of reforms in a speech to parliament on September 16 (Ref A). The president also said he had expressed his condolences to all those who had lost loved-ones in the conflict regardless of which side they were on.

¶3. (C) Saakashvili did not hesitate when responding to a pointed German question on the origins of the war. He countered the German implication that Georgia was looking for a fight by saying Georgia had expected aggression for a long time and had merely been preparing to defend itself. He claimed to have been trying to downplay tensions and said he would welcome a fully transparent investigation into the causes of the war, including plans for the creation of a parliamentary investigation into the causes of the war. Saakashvili related a conversation he had with Putin in November 2006, in which Putin had threatened to damage the Georgian economy. Saakashvili said Putin had commented that if economic measures failed then he would turn Georgia into Cyprus. Saakashvili was deeply grateful to France for obtaining a ceasefire from Russia when Moscow did not want to talk, and hoped that the French would stay engaged after the end of their EU presidency.

¶4. (C) Saakashvili acknowledged that Russia must be part of the solution to ongoing tensions. He laid out his priorities for the October Geneva talks.

- compliance with the 6-point plan
- an absolute right of dignified return of IDPs to both South Ossetia and Abkhazia
- access for any monitors to all of the disputed areas

He said that under no circumstances would Georgia give up any territory, but guaranteed that Georgia would pursue its aims by exclusively peaceful means.

¶5. (C) Saakashvili asserted that one of the worries for the other side had been Georgian soft power successes won by providing ethnically mixed villages with schools and healthcare. The President said that the Russian interest in this conflict was control of energy routes and regime change in Tbilisi. He was grateful to donors for the measures announced to bolster the Georgian economy, and promised to continue economic reforms. The President also promised deeper political reforms and asked PermReps to remember that Georgia is playing its part in a merit-based process with NATO that is leading to a decision on the provision of MAP in December. This, he said, would be a moral decision on the part of the Alliance.

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PM to NAC - It's the Economy Stupid  
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¶6. (C) After signing the protocols for the establishment of the new NATO Georgia Commission (Ref B) Prime Minister Lado Gurgenedze characterized Georgia as a young liberal democracy with a vibrant economy which is suffering from a Russian effort to erode liberty and set a different political direction for the country. He said the level of international support for Georgia would determine the direction of developments for months and years to come. Gurgenedze said the damage to Georgian economy had been significant, including damage to private property, deliberate environmental damage by Russia, and loss of fiscal revenue for the rest of the year. The PM highlighted the greatest threat to the Georgian economy would be loss of confidence, which would have to be restored within weeks or there would be a risk of severe economic decline. Such decline, he said, would risk social unrest, and possible regime change, as Russia desired. Gurgenedze briefed on U.S., IMF, and other international efforts to bolster the economy and expressed his deepest thanks. He looked forward to the Georgia donor conference in October, and underlined his view that possible free trade agreements with the EU and U.S. would be crucial.

¶7. (C) The PM promised that Georgia was ready to play its role in regional energy security. After displaying an impressive knowledge of the details of Georgia's energy

supplies, Gurgendidze warned of the strategic importance for Georgia of the Enguri Dam (Note: He indicated that Georgia plans to diversify supply through the construction of multiple smaller hydroelectric plants. End note). The Prime Minister echoed Saakashvili's view that one of the causes of the conflict had been the success of Georgian soft power in South Ossetia. He said the population had begun to notice the real progress in Georgian controlled areas, and this development had been a real threat to the "kleptocracy of the separatist regime." Gurgendidze said he was certain Georgia could win again through soft power. Gurgendidze looked forward to deepening reforms in Georgia, mentioning that President Saakashvili would soon announce a new package of reforms to parliament. He pledged Georgia's commitment to continue its work towards integration with NATO which, he said, would be the ultimate guarantor of Georgia's stability and security.

¶18. (C) Defense Minister Kezerashvili, in a very short intervention, said Georgia is currently conducting a damage assessment. He said a strategic defense review would be accompanied by new defense planning that would encompass the new realities of a self-defense mission. Kezerashvili said Georgia's priority remains NATO membership, and NATO interoperability would remain a core defense priority

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Parliament: Even the Opposition stands  
with us (for now)  
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¶19. (C) Speaker Davit Bakradze told the NAC that there was a danger of losing one of the great achievements of the end of the cold war: the end of spheres of influence. He warned that issues such as access for monitors involve the changing of the borders of Europe, and suggested that the international community had a key role to play in its response to ethnic cleansing. He also highlighted the need for a new conflict resolution mechanism, as all that is in place is the 6-point plan. The Speaker also emphasized that whoever controls Georgia would have the power to cut off energy supply routes.

¶10. (C) Bakradze referenced James Madison's conclusion that problems with democracy can only be solved with more democracy. Reforms would be intensified. He viewed the conflict as the price for "living outside of the environment that defends democracies." In response to PermReps questions on MAP, Bakradze said he would view MAP as a framework for more robust reforms, rather than a privilege for Georgia. He indicated his willingness to work with members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly to build more support for Georgia.

¶11. (C) Bakradze pledged his continued willingness to work with all members of the opposition, including those that had chosen not to take their seats in parliament. He underlined that election timetables would not be postponed as a result of the crisis.

¶12. (C) Assembled Georgian Parliamentarians from the opposition expressed similar sentiments to Bakradze in relation to Euro-Atlantic Integration and MAP. Some underlined that this was a time for national unity and several referred to a three point charter adopted by the Parliament that reaffirmed Georgia's NATO aspirations, the territorial integrity of Georgia, and a national commitment to act only within the constitutional framework. Opposition members expressed enthusiasm for election reform, but a central message to the NAC was that MAP would be a way to avoid further bloodshed. Several contended a failure by NATO to grant MAP in December would be a signal to Moscow that Russia will retain freedom of action in Georgia, and the region.

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NAC PermReps play familiar tunes  
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¶13. (C) PermReps' comments during the series of meetings conveyed a sense that national positions were relatively unchanged, despite the August conflict. The only perceptible

shift was an air of greater caution when MAP was mentioned, with even strong supporters of Georgia urging them to also focus on reform.

¶14. (C) Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer underlined that this visit came at a "difficult and complex time," before highlighting NATO's view that Russia had used disproportionate force. He repeated that Moscow must live up to its commitments under the Sarkozy 6-point plan. At the same time de Hoop Scheffer emphasized that Georgia must stay the course of reform, which would remain essential on the path towards further Euro-Atlantic integration.

¶15. (C) The conflict itself was a central theme in all discussions. For example, in the meeting with the President, Belgium condemned the Russian use of force and the subsequent recognition of the separatist provinces. Czech PermRep Stefan Fule recalled the 1968 Prague incursion by Soviet forces as a parallel to the August conflict in Georgia. His Lithuanian counterpart rejected Russian FM Lavrov's new principles of defending "Russian citizens," while the Canadian PermRep asserted that reversal of the Russian action would be essential to restoring regional peace and security. Spain, by contrast, stood alone by repeatedly calling for all communication on the issue to include Russia.

¶16. (C) French PermRep Andreani often underlined the Sarkozy peace initiative, which many PermReps explicitly supported. Lithuania said EU observers must be able to deploy to all areas of Georgia. Lithuania and Canada led calls for an independent investigation into the outbreak of violence, while Norway also cautioned that any credible investigation would have to look into both sides' actions. All PermReps underlined their support for Georgian territorial integrity and sovereignty.

¶17. (C) Many Allies called on Georgia to continue its reforms. However, Czech PermRep Fule thought that while reform is important the MAP decision will be based on more political considerations. Italy hoped Georgia would look to the future and not to the past. The Italian asserted that Georgia needs to develop more economic and social strength rather than military strength. Bulgaria echoed this theme, encouraging Georgia to avoid new tensions and develop a modus vivendi with its northern neighbor.

¶18. (C) German PermRep Brandenburg's cynicism stood out, even though he claimed to be bringing a message of support for Georgia. He shared that Germany would provide 40 observers for the EU monitoring mission, while calling for both OSCE and UN observers to continue their missions in the separatist areas. Brandenburg pointedly insisted that responsibility for the outbreak of conflict could be shared. He said there were questions that both Russia and Georgia should be asked, including the issue of Georgian preparations for the conflict and the withdrawal of the Georgian peacekeeping element from Tskhinvali in the month before the conflict. He reiterated the German call for NATO to have a "supportive role," and not to be part of the problem (Note: this in reality is a call for NATO to have the minimum possible role. End note).

¶19. (C) Ambassador Volker's interventions complimented the Georgian people on their courage and resilience in their commitment to economic and democratic reform. He said the NAC visit was a symbol that NATO stands with Georgia, that NATO supports Georgian territorial integrity and sovereignty and that the Alliance wants to see full implementation of the ceasefire and the withdrawal of Russian forces. Ambassador Volker also saw the creation of the new NGC as a step that moves beyond the symbolism towards practical action.

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NAC meeting with UN, EU, and OSCE  
representatives  
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¶20. (C) While EU Representative for the South Caucasus Peter

Semneby conveyed little new information to the NAC, OSCE Ambassador Terhi Hakala, and UNOMIG DSRSG Ivo Petrov provided useful perspectives. Hakala said she had met with Russian FM Lavrov on September 15 but Lavrov would allow only eight OSCE observers the right to patrol within the former conflict zone under the Russian approach to the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan. Lavrov had said that further deployments must be agreed with the South Ossetians. Petrov warned that the UNOMIG mandate would expire on October 15 and said that he had no clarity on the future of the mission. PermReps expressed strong support for the work of all three organizations. Germany asked whether the Georgians had breached their obligations in July by failing to provide forces to the joint peacekeeping operation in South Ossetia. The UK PermRep quickly objected, asking whether it could be said that the Russians have any legal basis for any of their actions.

¶21. (C) Breakout sessions offered the following options:

- Visit to the NATO Information Office and the Georgian Air Operations Center
- Roundtable with opposition members
- Meeting with the Deputy Ombudsman
- Roundtable with NGO and media representatives

Ambassador Volker attended the NGO and media session, and found it to be a dynamic and useful exchange of views. The briefing at the Georgian Air Operations Center was poorly done, with some of the delegation expressing themselves more confused after the presentation than before. We understand from several Allies that the sessions with the Deputy Ombudsman and with the opposition both injected a new perspective. Allies heard opinions on the nature of Georgian democracy that had not been heard in previous sessions with the government. Again, the significance of this to Allies seems to depend on pre-existing positions.

¶22. (C) The final trip activity involved visits to the 1st Infantry Brigade barracks and to a refugee camp. Conflict damage at the base was varied, with the vast majority of the buildings intact, but some lying in ruins, apparently from aerial bombardment. While we were also briefed on Russian efforts to degrade the base while occupying it during the conflict, this was a short visit which seemed to have been designed more for visual impact than information sharing. The Refugee camp, run by UNHCR with assistance from Italy and France, held 2,200 IDPs in 250 tents. Most had fled to Tbilisi during the fighting, then had returned as far as Gori, but felt unable to go farther north. Many family members had made quick trips home to assess the possibility of return, or to tend to crops, but there seemed to be no sense that a general return would be possible and the camp was being winterized. The UNHCR and International Rescue Committee representatives said that as of September 16 (40 days after the Russian invasion), there were still 66,000 displaced persons in Georgia unable to return to their homes.

¶23. (U) Georgian media gave extensive positive coverage to the NAC visit. All major Georgian television companies dedicated their primetime to the NAC meeting in Tbilisi. The bottom-line of the Georgian print media reaction to the NAC meeting was one of NATO's strong support for Georgia and its territorial integrity, however, a lack of clear message on Georgia receiving MAP status in December. The Georgians especially picked up on two specific messages from the SecGen; one, that no other country would have a veto over Georgia's accession to NATO, and two, Georgia must advance democratic reforms.

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Comment  
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¶24. (C) First reactions from the NAC appear to be that the Georgians put on a solid trip and said the right things. Saakashvili was not unreasonable in his meeting, and the PM gave an exceptional performance. We do know that SYG Jaap de Hoop Scheffer remains unhappy with Saakashvili and delivered tough messages in their bilateral meeting. The SYG's staff



says that de Hoop Scheffer felt Saakashvili tried to box him into saying things he did not want to say in their press conference, further alienating the SYG toward the President.

¶25. (C) We do not assess that national positions will change much as a result of this visit. Skeptics of MAP for Georgia were keen to encourage further reforms, and it seems that the GoG intends to call their bluff. Germany remains unhelpful, and appeared to use the visit more as a fishing expedition for critical material than an opportunity for an honest appraisal of the situation on the ground. German calls for NATO to play a "supportive role" and not become part of the problem should be seen for what they are: a call for NATO to have the minimum involvement possible (Indeed, at a PermReps lunch on September 30, the German PermRep declared that NATO must 'remain neutral' in the conflict between Georgia and Russia). The new Spanish PermRep was happy to call for NATO to talk to Russia, even in meetings with our Georgian hosts. We conclude from this that Spain will continue to be a growing problem when dealing with issues involving Russia.

¶26. (C) The Georgian Mission to NATO has shared Tbilisi's initial assessment that the PermReps, even the most friendly to Georgia, sounded more cautious about the possibility of MAP in December. We believe they are correct, with even some of the Balts prone to mentioning further reforms in the same sentence as MAP. Our Georgian contacts in Brussels attribute this slight change in NATO's tone on the conflict itself. They echo the fears we heard in Tbilisi about what Russia will feel free to do if NATO declines to grant MAP at the December Ministerial.

¶27. (C) A long road to MAP has become longer as a result of the conflict. The next challenge is how best to use the newly-inaugurated NGC. This was conceived in a search for a political deliverable in the run up to the August 19 NATO Foreign Ministerial and no nation has yet successfully defined the paradigm of what the NGC is really supposed to be. Some of the more helpful Allies have made it explicitly clear that they do not see the NGC as a substitute for MAP, but already Italy has described the NGC as an intensification of NATO's intensified dialogue process. We will have to work hard with Georgia to ensure that early meetings of the NCG demonstrate further maturity from the Georgian side, and that these encounters have enough substance to make concrete strides in the NATO-Georgia relationship. End comment.

¶28. (U) This cable has been cleared by Embassy Tbilisi.  
VOLKER